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EDITOR'S NOTE

Adventures on land and sea

Iva Maurin, who is a former *Saipan Tribune* reporter but is now a correspondent for the paper and TAGA *Plus*, has done what I've always dreamed of doing—learning how to scuba dive. As with many things in life, hindsight is 20/20: I should have done it many years ago, when the siren call of Saipan's turquoise waters were insistently calling for me to explore its hidden wonders. These days, I just watch with envy and regret as others take to the waters and explore what so many tourists pay top dollar for when they come to the CNMI. In her cover story, "Discovering Saipan's underwater world," Iva tells of her underwater adventure—from the initial trepidation and fear of swimming, to dipping a tentative toe in the waters off Sugar Dock, to going full-blown PADI-certified and cavorting with turtles and different kinds of fish and even with a shy octopus. Her story will make you want to go scuba diving yourself and is a thrilling tale about overcoming one's fears and learning to trust yourself, your swim buddies, and your instructor.

The underwater theme of this TAGA *Plus* edition continues with staff writer Roselyn Monroyo's feature on spearfishing, "Gone spearfishing" and its sidebar about spearfishing safety rules. These days, you can actually go fishing without leaving the comfort of your living room couch. There are now games that you can play on your Wii, XBox or PlayStation for fishing aficionados, with different difficulty levels and where the Easy Level makes it so ridiculously easy that the fish seem like they can't wait to bite your digital bait. But then where's the thrill in that? The adrenaline rush of free-diving and holding that single breath for as long as you can while hunting for fish? Those who are into spearfishing make it look so easy but it must entail uncommon grit, stamina, and enormous lung power to do all that they do on a single gulp of air. Back in college, my friends and I would dare each other to dive into the deep end of the pool and hold our breath for as long as we could. I'm sure it was bananas and nothing compared to what spearfishers do in the open sea.

Heading back to land, correspondent Bea Cabrera shares a tale about a unique aspect of Fijian culture called lovo, which is about cooking food in a pit on the ground. As she tells it in "Lovo: The art of underground cooking," river rocks are heated until they are white-hot, then the food—usually meat or fish—is placed on top of the rocks and the whole ensemble is covered in burlap and woven coconut fronds to trap the heat and slow cook the meat for about two hours. And while waiting for the food to cook, the guests usually play games to pass the time, making the lovo a communal way of cooking.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of TAGA *Plus* as much as we enjoyed putting it together. For suggestions, reactions, comments, or criticisms, just shoot us an email at editor@saipantribune.com.

Sinseramente,

Jayvee Vallejera
Editor

COVER ART

Iva and her husband, Larry, are seen here during a dive in Laulau on the final day of their Open Water Dive certification course. Photo is screen-grabbed from videos taken by PADI instructor Masao Hoshino.

Photo by
MASAO HOSHINO

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THE USUAL SUSPECTS

BEA CABRERA

Bea, a *Saipan Tribune* correspondent and regular contributor to TAGA *Plus*, loves to travel and explore other cultures, which is why her stories in this edition focuses on those interests. She moved to Saipan with her husband four years ago and, in her free time, enjoys yard work with '80s New Wave music in the background.

IVA B. MAURIN

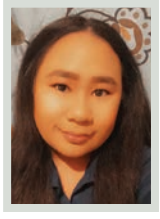
Iva is a nature lover enjoying the Saipan island adventure with her loving husband, Larry. She's a writer (read her articles on *Saipan Tribune*) and an artist, and is a wannabe baker/cook (she's currently working on her kitchen skill. On weekends, you may catch her snorkeling or birdwatching, and when you see her, don't be shy, say hi! Contact her at iva_maurin@saipantribune.com.

JASON B. MIYASHITA

Jason is the managing director of Raymond James & Associates in Guam where he is also senior institutional consultant and senior vice president, Investments. Miyashita has more than 15 years of experience in the financial services industry and was born and raised in Guam. Contact him at jason.b.miyashita@raymondjames.com.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Roselyn has never tried any form of fishing, but grew up knowing the many varieties of fish and how to gut them with her frequent trips to markets and haggling with vendors. She does not have the courage to dive into the water to go spearfishing, but promises herself that, one day, before she calls in a career in sportswriting, she will do it to bring something to the table. Atulai, anyone? Contact her at roselyn_monroyo@saipantribune.com.



JUSTINE NAUTA

Justine Nauta, who is pursuing double major in Liberal Arts with Emphasis on Social Work and Bachelor of Science in Rehabilitation and Human Services at the Northern Marianas College, is *Saipan Tribune*'s newest reporter. She took a leap of faith when the job presented itself and that leap of faith has shown her a different career path, and a spark for writing. Justine's goal as a reporter is to share the truth to the community while also making sure her work is accurate. Contact Justine at jnauta14@gmail.com.

MARK RABAGO

A certified foodie, Mark Rabago has long wanted to become a food critic. But becoming a food critic in Saipan's close-knit community may not be good idea. Mark first played against Andres "Jun" Estolas at the old CIC center basketball court. Needless to say, Mark did more watching than defending as the player they call "The Flash" was just too fast for him. Contact him at mark_rabago@saipantribune.com.

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Rosemary Fish Fillets with Lemon Garlic Pasta.

LINDA GASSENHEIMER/TNS

Lemon, garlic sauce, rosemary make flavorful fish dish

Rosemary adds a fragrant touch to sauteed fish fillets. I have used mahi-mahi, but any type of firm white fish will work. The cooking time depends on the size of the fish. Count about 8 minutes per inch of thickness.

The lemon and garlic sauce flavors the pasta and complements the rosemary on the fish.

LINDAGASSENHEIMER
Tribune News Service

Helpful Hints:

- Snapper, grouper, tilapia or cod can be used instead of mahi-mahi.
- Any type of short cut pasta such as corkscrew or ziti can be used.
- A quick way to chop rosemary is to snip the leaves with a scissors while on the stem.

Countdown:

- Place water on to boil.
- Make pasta.
- Saute fish.

Shopping List:

Here are the ingredients you'll need for tonight's Dinner in Minutes.
To buy: 3/4 pound mahi-mahi, 1 package fresh rosemary or 1 bottle dried rosemary, 1 package pine nuts, 1 container fat-free no-salt-added chicken broth, 1/4 pound broccoli florets, 1 box penne pasta, 1 lemon, 1 small piece Parmesan cheese.
Staples: olive oil, onion, minced garlic, salt and black peppercorns.

Rosemary-Crusted Mahi-Mahi

- 3/4 pound mahi-mahi
- 1 tablespoon fresh rosemary or 1 teaspoon dried rosemary
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons pine nuts
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Rinse fish and pat dry with paper towel. Press rosemary onto both sides of the fish. Heat oil in a small non-stick skillet over medium-high heat. When skillet is smoking, add fish and brown for 1 minute. Brown second side for another minute. Lower heat and cook 5 more minutes. Sprinkle with pine nuts and salt and pepper to taste.

Yield 2 servings.
Per serving: 227 calories (38% from fat), 9.6 g fat (1.6 g saturated, 3.8 g monounsaturated), 126 mg cholesterol, 32.2 g protein, 2.2 g carbohydrates, 1.3 g fiber, 155 mg sodium.

Lemon Garlic Pasta

- 1/4 pound penne pasta, about 1 1/2 cups
- 1/4 pound broccoli florets, about 1 1/4 cups
- 1/2 tablespoon olive oil, divided use
- 1 cup sliced onion
- 3 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1/2 cup fat free, no-salt-added chicken broth (divided use)
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Bring a large saucepan of water to a boil. Add the penne and boil 8 minutes. Add the broccoli to the saucepan and continue to boil 2 minutes. Meanwhile, heat 1 teaspoon olive oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add the onion and saute 2 to 3 minutes. Add the garlic, chicken broth, remaining olive oil and lemon juice. Cook 2 minutes. Drain pasta and add to the skillet. Toss well for a minute. Add salt and pepper to taste and sprinkle Parmesan cheese on top.

Yield 2 servings.
Per serving: 316 calories (17% from fat), 5.9 g fat (1.5 g saturated, 2.1 g monounsaturated), 4 mg cholesterol, 12.7 g protein, 54.7 g carbohydrates, 3.1 g fiber, 129 mg sodium.

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JASON B. MIYASHITA
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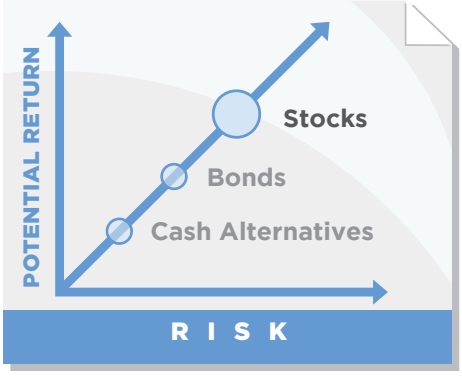
TAGA *Plus* Contributing Writer

Types of Investments: **Bonds**

How do bonds work?

When you buy a bond, you're basically buying an IOU. Bonds, sometimes called fixed-income securities, are essentially loans to a corporation or governmental body. The borrower (the bond issuer) typically promises to pay the lender, or bondholder, regular interest payments until a certain date. At that point, the bond is said to have matured. When it reaches that maturity date, the full amount of the loan (the principal or face value) must be repaid.

A bond typically pays a stated interest rate called the coupon, a term that dates back to the days when a bondholder had to clip a coupon attached to the bond and mail it in to receive each interest payment. Most bonds pay interest on a fixed schedule, usually quarterly or semiannually, although some pay all interest at maturity along with the principal.



There are two fundamental ways that you can profit from owning bonds. The most obvious is the interest that bonds pay. However, you can also make money if you sell a bond for more than you paid for it. As with any security, bond prices move up and down in response to investor demand; they also are sensitive to changes in interest rates. Bonds redeemed prior to maturity may be worth more or less than their original cost, and those that seek to achieve higher yields also involve a higher degree of risk.

Advantages
- Generally, a predictable stream of income
- Income typically higher than cash investments
- Relatively lower risk compared to stocks
- Low correlation with stock market

Tradeoffs
- Risk of default
- Bond values fluctuate with interest rates
- Generally, lower potential returns compared to stocks

The role of bonds in your portfolio

One of the most important reasons that investors choose bonds is for their steady and predictable stream of income through interest payments. Bonds have traditionally been important for retirees for this reason. Also, though they are not risk-free—for example, a bond issuer could default on a payment or even fail to repay the principal--bonds are considered somewhat less risky than stocks. In part, that's because a corporation must pay interest to bondholders before it pays dividends to its shareholders. Also, if it declares bankruptcy or dissolves, bondholders are first in line to be compensated.

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By quality	❑ Investment grade ❑ High yield ("junk")
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The bond market often behaves very differently from stocks. For example, when stock prices are down, investors often prefer bonds because of their relative stability and interest payments. Also, when interest rates are high, bond returns can be attractive enough that investors decide not to assume the greater risk of stocks. Interest from bonds can help balance stock fluctuations and increase a portfolio's stability. And because a bond's face value gets repaid upon maturity, you can choose a bond that matures when you need the money.

Some bonds are exempt from federal or state and local income tax. This can be appealing to investors in high tax brackets.

Next issue, we will talk about cash investments.

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Pet preparations for a disaster

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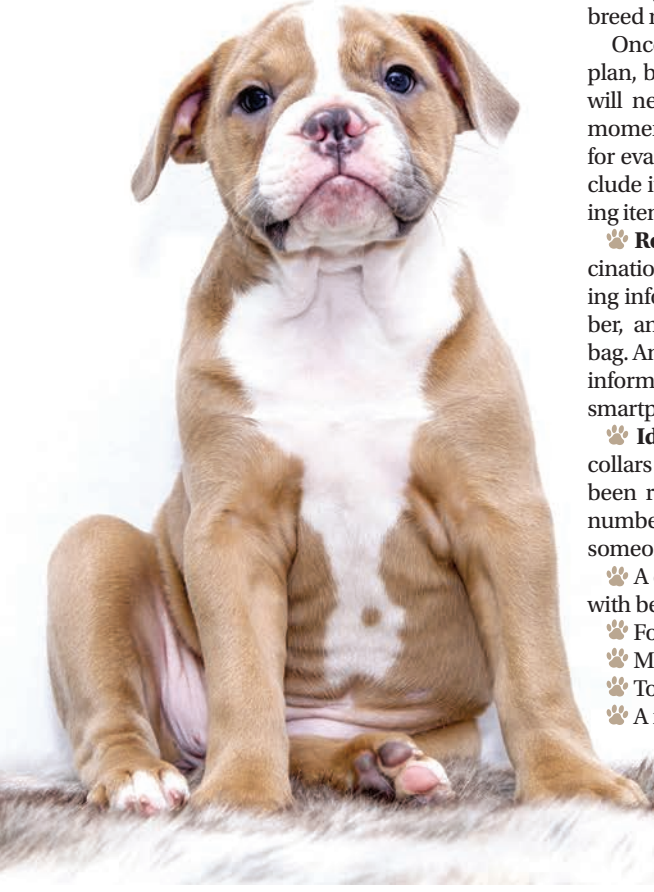

Hurricane season is here and now is a good time to review your family's preparedness plan including the plan for your pet for natural and other disasters.

Disasters can be a large-scale event, such as a hurricane or wildfire, or they can be a very personal event, such as a house fire. Both types of disasters require an evacuation plan. And, traveling with pets requires additional forethought and planning.

One of the first questions centers on location: Where will your family go and is that location hospitable for your pets? Each family should select a local and non-local location.

Local locations could include a family or friend's home, and if those homes were not suitable for your pets, these location plans could also include your favorite boarding facility. When looking for evacuation locations outside of your local area, a hotel might be an option to keep the people and pets in your family together. As part of your family's disaster preparedness plan, call hotel chains to inquire on their pet guest limitations and if those generally change during cases of natural disaster. Remember that even "pet-friendly" establishments could have size or breed restrictions.

Once locations are established in your plan, begin listing and collecting items that will need to be gathered, sometimes at a moment's notice. A disaster kit is essential for evacuating a disaster. This kit should include items your family uses daily—including items your pets use daily such as:

- **Records:** Gather your pet's recent vaccination and/or medical records, identifying information, such as a microchip number, and pictures to keep in a waterproof bag. Another option is to have these records, information, and photos stored on your smartphone.
- **Identification:** Ensure your pets have collars with tags and microchips that have been registered with a current cell phone number and an emergency number of someone outside of the effected disaster.
- A crate or carrier for each pet complete with bedding
- Food and water, plus bowls for feeding
- Medications essential for your pet
- Toys and treats
- A non-retractable leash
- Kitty litter, litter pan, and scoop
- A muzzle if your dog is not people and/or dog friendly (Visit muzzleupproject.com to learn how to teach your dog to enjoy wearing his muzzle.)
- Cleaning supplies such as newspapers, paper towels, poop bags, and handi-wipes

With COVID-19 cases still active in our area, disaster plans must take into account safety protocols and practices to reduce the chance of infection or spread. For these reasons, families evacuating from a natural disaster may not find a traditional mass sheltering facility. Traditionally, organizations would come together and house evacuees at a single location. This type of housing, while keeping individuals out of harms way from the natural disaster, also carries the risk of exposing evacuees to possible infection. During the evacuation of Hurricane Laura, for example, those in need of these services could access information through local news organizations and by dialing 2-1-1. When reaching out for sheltering information, don't forget to also ask what plans are in place for your pets. Questions to keep in mind are:

- How close will your sheltering facility be to the animal shelter facility?
- What responsibilities will your have for your animals while they are sheltered?

In many disaster sheltering scenarios, the family of the sheltered pet will be required to care for their animal. This could include feeding, cleaning, and walking. Plus, having close contact with your pets during a stressful event can bring a moment of calm.

In the unfortunate event that your pets flee the scene of the disaster or you were unable to get your pet during a sudden disaster, reach out to your local animal shelter and your local animal control or protection officers. They may be providing services and/or housing effected animals.

Your pets are part of your family. Keeping them safe means including them in disaster planning before the disaster strikes. September is National Preparedness Month and the perfect time to stop and think about plans for all members of your family. Disasters can be sudden and are always stressful. Being prepared can give you piece of mind and maintain that your family stays together—even in the toughest of times.

Additional helpful information can be found at fema.gov/helping-pets.

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rces, and effort to community work.

Then one day, when it's time to call it quits and hang up that jersey, look back not only at the championships you won, but also the people you assisted, the worthy causes you supported, the inspiration you provided, and the community you helped become a better place to live in.

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MERRICK

A new school year usually mean interscholastic competition opportunities for Mt. Carmel School student Merrick Toves. He suits up for the Knights in not just one but three sports and excels in all. Not this time, though. TAGA *Plus* sits down with Merrick and asked him what it's like to maintain being an outstanding multi-sports athlete during a pandemic.

What sport did you learn to play first? How did you get involved with that sport? How was your first game or experience in that sport?

The first sport I learned to play was basketball. My brother Markel asked me if I wanted to play basketball with him and my dad encouraged me to join. We would practice at the Garapan basketball court with the Rollers. Even though I was the youngest, I believe I was only like 5 or 6 years old, coach Joe Diaz introduced me to the basics. My first game or experience? I didn't really get to play that much because I was short and young and so, I understand. But my first actual game was when I went to school at WSR. I played on the school team when I was in 3rd grade.

As a student of Mount Carmel School, you play volleyball, basketball, and soccer for the Knights. Why three sports and not just one?

To choose among volleyball, basketball, and soccer is tough. I love all three sports because they have their own special feeling of "winning." I am very lucky to be a part of the CNMI National Soccer team, as we practice almost throughout the entire year. So that helps me with my conditioning and vertical for basketball. Volleyball, I love it and just play it for fun.

What is it with volleyball that attracted you to it? How about basketball? And soccer?

For volleyball, I first learned how to play at Hyatt [Regency Saipan]. It was a beach volleyball clinic with coach Russ Quinn. At the end, he encouraged me to continue to keep playing volleyball. So when I have a chance, I play. I play for the schools, I played for SportsFest with the church, and also when there are community tournaments. It's a lot of fun.

For basketball, coach Joe Diaz has always continued to encourage me to play basketball. One tournament, I had the opportunity to play for the Ol'Aces. I enjoyed playing with them. Being that my priority has always been soccer, I couldn't fully commit my time to basketball. So, I understand that…it was unfair for them to keep my spot on the team. Later, when the Rollers invited me to return, I did. Coach Joe understands my challenges with time. So he supports me and my soccer commitment. I have grown to love basketball too. And if any opportunity to play in college [arises], I am keeping my options open.

For soccer, when I first started playing, I was in 3rd grade, a student at WSR, and was introduced to the Kanoa Football Club. At the beginning, I wasn't fully confident that I would like the sport or even be good at it. But growing up with the Kanoa Football Club, the players and coaches, they are family. Our coaches and club officers really care for us.

TOVES

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TAGA *Plus* Staff Writer

Not just about soccer, but even outside of soccer and that's what makes Kanoa special. I am very proud to be from Kanoa FC, and thankful. If it wasn't for Kanoa FC, I would not be where I am today.

You are preparing for college and planning to work on your recruitment profile to play in the collegiate ranks, so why focus on soccer? What aspect of your game do you need to work on or improve to get to the level you would want to be or to be able to meet the criteria of college teams?

Why focus on soccer? Here [on] Saipan, we are so very lucky to have the Northern Mariana Islands Football Association, which supports us and works hard to get us to compete internationally. And I mean compete. So, I do my part to put in the time. If coach allows me to attend extra practices so I can improve, I am there. I ask coach Mita (Michiteru Mita) if I can train with the men's team so I can get better. Before COVID-19, I was at the pitch six days a week. Now, only five. Our national coaches are always doing their best to bring the best out of us. This year, they added the "mental preparedness" Zoom class sessions. And that has helped too. Being a part of the national team for the past three years has been an honor. And the least I can do is continue to work hard and make them proud. Right now, I received camp invites from three different colleges in the [United] States. I am keeping my options open. If I can get any offers in Japan or even where NMI keeper Chris Aninzo is at (York St. John University in the United Kingdom), I just hope I will have that opportunity to continue to play at the next level.

As a keeper, I need to improve on my passes and punts. I am just doing my best to be teachable all around.

Was there a time in your life when you thought of quitting sports and just focus on being a student?

When I first started playing basketball, and even soccer, I wasn't sure if I was going to like it. So, I did step away for a little bit. But I was young and still learning. I am so thankful to have great coaches in these sports as they continue to encourage me to play. And of course, I have very supportive parents.

If there's one sport that you wish you could learn to play, what is it and why?

I wish I could learn more sports—play football, baseball, softball, badminton, and Ultimate Frisbee. I played baseball for one season and then quit because I didn't enjoy it as much. It wasn't a fast-paced game like soccer, basketball, or volleyball. For football, I enjoyed learning how to play football at MCS when I was in 6th grade. Mr. [John] Blanco invited me to play for the CNMI Sharks because he said I am fast, and I can catch and throw. But that was when I first started playing on the CNMI national team and my parents didn't want to risk any opportunity of me getting injured. For softball, it looks easy and fun. I would like to play for fun. With badminton, I played at TSL Sports Complex when my family would go and play. And it was fun. With Ultimate Frisbee, I learned how to play it in 6th grade with my P.E. teacher. I understood it right away and knew what to do. I just love being an athlete.

Gone spearfishing!

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No boat or do not have the patience to throw a fishing rod into the water and wait for the fish to bite? Go spearfishing.

Despite the availability of technologies that make catching the ocean's bounty easier, this ancient method of fishing is alive and well in the CNMI, with more and more young people getting into it and following in the footsteps of their folks.

Mi'i Lin Tekopua is among them, taking a cue from his dad, Mi'i Sr., and friends.

"My dad was a fisherman and my friends would fish a lot, so fishing was always an influence growing up. I started spearfishing at the age of 17. My friend, Michael Ito, was the one who introduced me to spearfishing, and what kept me hooked was the adventure of being in a different environment and seeing different types of fish or sea creatures while being able to catch fish for family and getting a workout out of it," said the Chalan Kanoa resident. »

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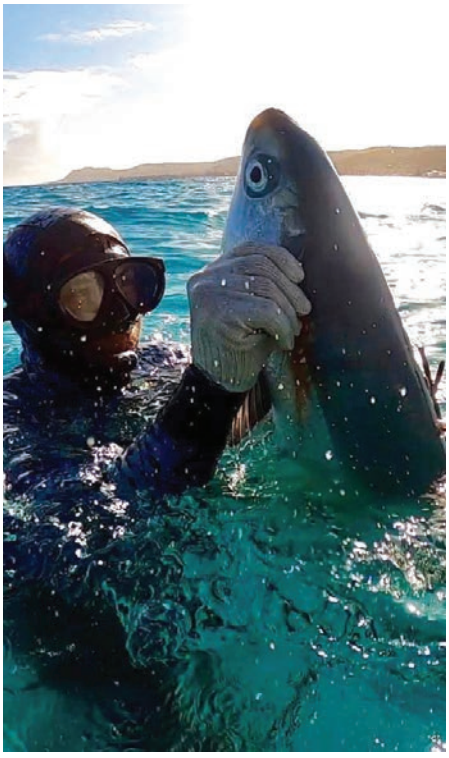

Tekopua goes spearfishing five times a week. This 24-year-old starts his preparation by checking the weather and tide charts for water conditions. He then contacts a diving partner (going into the water alone is a no-no). Before getting in gear (wetsuit, mask, fins, knife, speargun, and stringer), he hydrates (dehydration is one of the enemies of divers) with water and takes a light snack.

"One thing I never do before diving is consume greasy food or eat heavy," Tekopua said.

Once in the water, he makes sure he stays with his partner all the time and keeps an eye on him. They are responsible for each other.

The beauty and abundance of sea creatures may still overwhelm even a seasoned diver like Tekopua and some would be tempted to challenge themselves and go after many targets or stay in the water longer that they are used to. Tekopua, however, includes in his personal safety rules to never push himself to the limit and reminds his partner about safety first.

"I am able to hold my breath underwater for one minute and 42 seconds and on a good day two minutes and 37 seconds. I usually spend 3 ½ hours in the water every time I dive," said the Saipan Southern High School graduate.

His favorite hunting spot is the Sugar Dock in Chalan Kanoa and though he managed to

10 spearfishing safety rules

1 Do not dive without a buoy and a dive flag. Imagine if you are a boat captain and driving a boat for 20 mph (17 knots), all of a sudden a diver pops up right in front of your way. There is not much you can do and this scenario is very dangerous and can lead to death. You can share the buoy with your buddy and stay close within 150 feet (50m) of the buoy. So if you forget your buoy and dive flag, don't dive.

2 Stay close to your buddy and always monitor each other. Most of blackout cases happen after the diver has reached the surface. Make sure he's up and OK. "One up, one down" buddy system must be followed. "OK" hand signal each other after each dive is highly recommended.

3 Weight yourself properly. You should be neutrally buoyant in the middle of your max depth. In other words if your max depth is 60 feet, you should be able to float up without kicking at 30 feet or shallower. This makes it a little harder to go down at the start of your dive, but you want to put in the most effort at the beginning, not at the end when you try to ascend wearing more weights on your belt.

4 Do not hesitate to drop your weight belt if you are not 100 percent sure you'll get to the surface. There is nothing more important than your life especially when you compare it to just a piece of metal. But you need some practice to do this because in most cases, the belt gets stuck on your ankle and it makes it harder for you to go back up.

5 If you need to, drop your speargun also for same reason. The more you think eats more of your oxygen. The brain eats oxygen way more than you can imagine. Don't think twice, just let it go.

dive once to a maximum depth of 114 feet, his regular range is between 40 and 70 feet. Tekopua carries multiple spear guns with him, but mostly uses a 120cm Rob Allen Snapper.

His heaviest single catch? A 76-lb giant trevally, which he got last August during the Marianas Apnea Spearfishing Club's Mamulan Cup. Tekopua finished second in the competition and would have been first if the weight was the basis for deciding the winner instead of the combined length and width of the fish.

On a regular day, Tekopua, who is known in the spearfishing community in the CNMI and Guam as "Chinese Poksu" (his mom is Chinese and *poksu* in Chamorro means sharp shooter), finds it easy to catch parrot fish and, while there are many fish that are hard to catch, the toughest for him is the green job fish (or barracuda snapper) because it aggressively fights back when hit.

Tekopua uses a stringer to keep his catch and that can carry as much as 23 lbs of fish. At the end of his spearfishing day (he prefers going into the water in the morning for safety purposes), he usually eats the fish he caught or shares them with family and friends. He sometimes sells them, too, and calls it a day, thankful for getting home safely and looking forward to his next adventure.

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Remember, if you struggle, throw your speargun, and just concentrate to get the surface only. In most cases, you can pick up your speargun later.

6 Spit your snorkel out at the surface before you dive. If you black out underwater, your mouth will stay closed and keep water from flooding your lungs—as long as your snorkel isn't in your mouth.

7 Know your limit and adjust your bottom time depending on the days of your body/sea condition. Reject the idea that you know your body and can instinctively stay within your limits. Some world-class spearfishermen have died from shallow water blackout, they knew their bodies a lot better than you do, and it wasn't good enough. Spend twice as long at the surface as your last dive to insure enough time to recover. Using a free-diving watch, which indicates every second of your surface time, is highly recommended.

8 Stay properly hydrated. Your physiology is in a constant state of flux and this has a huge impact on your diving capabilities. The 2-minute, 60-foot dive that was a piece of cake for you in the morning could black you out in the afternoon. Always bring bottle of water and drink it.

9 Always protect the airway. If your buddy is in trouble, you must bring him to the surface and keep his face above water. Remove his mask and remind him to breathe. Blowing across the eyes can also stimulate the inflation reflex. Perform CPR if necessary.

10 It is always a good idea to have a first aid kit on the boat/vehicle in case of emergencies.

Source: Aquasmith

Buffets in a time of COVID-19

Raiders of the smorgasbord endured their own furlough when the islands' buffets were shuttered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Divorced from their primary source of sustenance (more like "very" guilty pleasure), they had to survive with restaurant take-outs, TV dinners, and, God forbid, home-made meals.

March, May, June, and parts of July were essentially the Dark Ages for buffet brats like me as we could only daydream of pyramids of tempura, endless slices of sashimi, mountains of shrimp, luscious roast beef, and other mouth-watering delights.

Come August and September with no community transmission in sight, hotel and restaurants slowly plotted to bring back their buffet offerings and that's when the islands' restauranteurs and food and beverage managers showed their knack for creativity on how to bring back the eat-all-you-can service to the masses.

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The author, left, with Lito and Cherrie Lumbana "graduate" from Kensington Hotel's Loria Restaurant.

Kensington Hotel Saipan

MARK RABAGO

Loria Restaurant's poached sliced beef in hot chili sauce with the buddha lid.

Kensington Hotel Saipan in San Roque was one of the first to usher itself back to the buffet scene with its "a la minute buffet" at its cavernous and chic Loria Restaurant.

The smorgasbord service is somewhat similar to buffet-style dining. However, instead of getting food from different stations and getting food as often as you want, waitstaff is at your beck and call, with Loria Restaurant's reformatted menu on hand. From there, you can have your pick of dishes to savor.

In that particular trip up north, I managed to polish off all 17 of the dishes on the menu that day, including the appetizers of bread, garden salad (Mama said I needed to eat my greens), and soup of the day. I probably finished four orders of angus beef strip. The Japanese selection was also a big hit for me as the chef's special hako sushi, nigiri sushi board, and California roll, crab meat were exquisite.

Poached sliced beef in hot chili sauce, which was part of the Chinese menu, was especially intriguing as it came in a white ceramic pot with what looked like a mini buddha figure on top of the lid, seemingly taunting you that, if you eat enough of this dish, you'd end with this rotund shape.

My friends and I wound up sampling all the dishes in the "a la minute buffet"—some had two, three, or four servings, but who's judging—and, for posterity's sake we all posed in front of the restaurant using the menu as "diplomas" signifying our "graduation."

»

MARK RABAGO

World Café's sushimi and appetizer station.

MARK RABAGO

Fiesta Resort & Spa Saipan F&B director Das Krishnan and F&B assistant Socorro Huliganga are flanked by staff at the World Café.

Fiesta Resort & Spa Saipan

I also had the pleasure of being invited to the reopening of the Fiesta Resort & Spa's World Café in late August with amiable F&B director Das Krishnan and F&B assistant Socorro Huliganga serving as the perfect hosts.

The Garapan hotel's buffet setup was also a tad different. Diners can still experience the thrill of walking up the buffet line, but there's a strict "look only, no touch policy," obviously in strict adherence to the Quasimodo of the buffet world, the CNMI Bureau of Environmental Health.

I would be remiss to point out that the current iteration of buffet dining at World Cafe reminds you of your typical Manila *carenderia* (eatery or cafeteria). An upscale version, mind you, as the COVID-19 pandemic has really rendered traditional buffets potential petri dishes of the virus. So, I'm good with the compromise.

At World Café, diners help themselves to the smorgasbord that is now divided into four stations: appetizer, main course, action station, and dessert and salad.

The old World Café buffet taste remains; it's just the delivery that's changed.

Krishnan explained that diners need only point at the food displayed in the four stations and the restaurant's waitstaff will then put the food on a plate and give it to them—hence my *turo-turo* (point-point in Filipino) reference.

MARK RABAGO

Fiesta Resort & Spa Saipan staff are always at your beck and call.

Hyatt Regency Saipan

Not to be outdone, the CNMI's only international hotel brand, Hyatt Regency Saipan, also reopened its Miyako Japanese restaurant last September. If you love cuisine from the Land of the Rising Sun, then Miyako is a gastronomic paradise for you.

Thanks to the familiarization tour organized by F&B director Ty Pauling, executive sous chef Zen Tomokane, and marketing manager Mariangela Mendoza, various media outlets were able to try out Hyatt's version of buffet dining in the time of COVID-19.

The Miyako set lunch menu comes in two varieties: Unlimited sashimi lunch and unlimited Miyako lunch, with emphasis on unlimited; you can order a particular dish as often as you can to your heart's content. Much like the set up at Loria Restaurant, diners stay in the cozy comforts of their seats and continue chatting with their friends while Hyatt waitstaff attentively bring them their orders.

That particular day, we dined on such favorites like steamed egg custard (that appetizer was divine and admittedly tastes like *balut* minus the beak and feathers), temari sushi, grilled white miso marinated salmon fillet, and silken tofu, while sharing wonderful plates of sushi and sashimi.

Miyako's Unlimited Lunch.

MARK RABAGO

Miyako's deluxe sashimi plate.

MARK RABAGO

MARK RABAGO

Hyatt Regency Saipan F&B director Ty Pauling, left and executive sous chef Zen Tomokane speak to the media during last September's FAM tour.

Less food waste

The current evolution of the local buffet dining experience also has had an unexpected but positive consequence, as food waste is at an all-time low. Pauling said lesser food waste doesn't only help Hyatt's bottom line, it also means that less resources of the planet are used. Krishnan seconded the observation and said Fiesta Resort is embracing the new concept of buffet dining as it's also very environmentally friendly. Who would've known that eating at a buffet can also save the planet!

Recently, Pacific Islands Club Saipan's The Magellan and Sura Saipan also reopened their buffet lines. I've yet to try their twist on the new normal for eat-all-you-can dining, but I look forward to visiting them soon. Hope they'll save a plate—or two—for me (wink, wink).

MY STORY

Discovering underwa

Saipan's underwater world

IVA MAURIN
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TAGA *Plus* Contributing Writer

I never imagined that at 40, I will learn to scuba dive.

Yes, this is a milestone for me.

I have always had this fear of swimming. When I was about 5, probably in an attempt to teach me how to do it, my father had me wrap my arms around his shoulders, only for him to straight up deep dive into the pool, leaving young me traumatized.

I can float, yes, but in my mind, I do not know how to swim. Maybe I have never gotten over that fear.

Fast forward to several decades later, here I am enjoying the underwater paradise of Saipan, something I have never even thought of ever experiencing. The past month, I have fluttered with over a dozen butterfly fish, glided with sea turtles, galloped with seahorses, and even almost shook tentacles with an extremely shy octopus.

How did all these happen? I guess, by just trying and wanting to conquer my fear.

Also, at the back of my mind, it would be a shame not to dive on Saipan. The island isn't one of the world's best diving destinations for nothing.

Testing the water

As soon as the COVID-19 restrictions on scuba diving were lifted, and local discounts on dive classes started floating on social media, we knew we had to dive.

»

Iva and her husband, Larry, deep underwater at Laulau, on the final day of their open water dive certification course. The deepest they got to swim on that day was 30 feet, and yes, they got certified! Photos are screen-grabbed from videos taken by PADI instructor Masao Hoshino.

And so last July, my husband, Larry, and I signed up for "Discover Scuba," a super introduction to scuba diving offered by local business, Aqua Connections. Larry already decided that he will be taking the Open Dive certification course, but I was still indecisive, so the "discovery" was more about me literally "testing the waters" and seeing if I would be comfortable with it or not.

On the day of our "test dive," we were given a crash course where we learned about the gear and how to use them, the hand signals to remember, how to remove water from the mask, among many other things. We suited up, and had our first taste of scuba diving at Sugar Dock.

Our instructor, Hoshi, gave us a pep talk, and really did his best to calm my nerves. I remember him being patient with us, as we walked inch by inch toward the deeper part of the sea, until we got to about 4 feet deep, where he first asked us to submerge and breathe through our mouthpiece, called a regulator.

He also made sure to remind us of the most important rule on scuba diving—"never hold your breath."

I followed the instructions to a tee, secured my mask, checked my gear, put the regulator in my mouth, positioned myself, and took my first breath underwater. The sound of bubbles from our tanks echoed loudly deep in the waters.

Funnily enough, I could not get myself to stay submerged. Hoshi wanted us to stay planted on the ocean floor and not float, and he had to add weights on me to keep me from drifting away. He also kept checking on me, through hand signals, to see if I was okay.

From there, we began our slow descent from being underwater at 4 feet to about 8 feet. Aside from seeing some fish, we saw a very tiny seahorse, which I would say was the marine highlight of that "dive." And also, yes, I know it's not that deep, but it is deep enough to convince a nervous wreck like me to go even deeper.

Getting ready for the open ocean

We signed up for the PADI Open Water Certification course immediately after our "Discover Scuba" session. Just when I thought it's simply going to be about diving somewhere deeper, I was wrong. We were handed a decently thick Open Water Diver Manual to fully review, plus a set of test sheets to answer.

I was nervous when the first day of the course came, but felt better when I saw a familiar face, Frankie, who would be with us on our journey. I got even more relieved when Frankie said he has not done any diving. At least, I would not be the only one who's probably nervous.

After reviewing our test results, we got suited up and began our pool training. There, we got reacquainted with our gear and how to use them, how to breathe properly underwater, how to remove water from our masks, how to check our tanks, how to swim and adjust our buoyancy, as well as the buddy system, which is basically having a partner underwater.

We were also taught some major skills—removing our regulators underwater and switching to using our buddy's alternate regulator, as well as removing and putting back our masks on, also underwater, which was a real challenge for me.

After spending hours on the pool, the time came for us to get to the ocean.

Hoshi asked if I was ready. I said yes.

Open diving at Laulau...finally!

Our group of four went to Laulau, probably the most popular diving spot on Saipan next to the Grotto. After some pep talk and a quick refresher from Hoshi, we began our deep journey to the unknown.

From the shore, we walked toward this channel where a rope awaits to help make it easier for divers to descend. At that point, I was really nervous. My mind was asking, "Are you sure you're ready to sink and perhaps get eaten by sharks?" but my heart was screaming "YOLO! You only live once, so live!"

Needless to say, I grabbed the rope, focused on Hoshi's instructions, and went full on underwater.

I was the first to go, not because I was the bravest, but most probably because I was the one who needed guidance the most. Tightly grabbing on to the rope, little by little each one of us descended into the deep blue. I remember stopping at one point because I started getting anxious when it dawned on

That first experience deep underwater was amazing! We kept diving, swimming with, and gazing at countless fish, corals, and sponges. The entire time, though, I would admit, I was very conscious and kept looking at my tank's gauge, fascinated by the fact that I could actually really breathe deep underwater but, at the same time, wary as to how much air I still have in my tank to keep going.

Discovering scuba diving and learning to take my first breath underwater at Sugar Dock. Photos are screen-grabbed from videos taken by PADI instructor Masao Hoshino.

me that we were really legit underwater, and that there's no way we're turning back (well, there was, but thankfully, we didn't).

Most probably sensing my nerves, Hoshi helped by holding my hands then wiggling my arms as if to say "relax", and also by motioning with his hands to breathe calmly, which worked. My husband also kept an eye on me, and so did Frankie, making sure that I am safe. We all made sure we're safe.

At one point while underwater, Hoshi made us switch regulators with our buddy, as well as do all the other scuba lessons we learned during our pool training. All these as we also worked on our buoyancy.

That first experience deep underwater was amazing! We kept diving, swimming with, and gazing at countless fish, corals, and sponges. The entire time, though, I would admit, I was very conscious and kept looking at my tank's gauge, fascinated by the fact that I could actually really breathe deep underwater but, at the same time, wary as to how much air I still have in my tank to keep going.

Much as we were enjoying our dive, having descended up until we reached 24 feet deep, we also had to learn to swim back to the surface.

After some more minutes, Hoshi guided us to a rope, which we had to grab on to as we ascended, making one quick safety stop before finally resurfacing through another channel, our portal back to the "normal" dimension.

As soon as I saw I was out of the water, I took my mask off to breathe normal air.

We waited on each other to resurface. Once we're complete, the four of us slowly walked back to shore, tired but excited as we talked about the experience. For a few minutes we rested, before gearing up with our other tank and heading back to the ocean for yet another dive.

At 40, thank you for this experience of a lifetime.

'The Flash' is taking it slow

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Estolas proudly hoists the Mobil league championship trophy.

From lightning-quick point guard with range extending to way past the 3-point line, to a masters player content with just setting up teammates but can still bail his team out with timely baskets at crucial times.

That pretty much sums up the 18-year career of Andres "Jun" Estolas on Saipan. He first arrived on island as a fresh-faced assassin that could do everything with the ball. You need someone to negotiate through a phalanx of full-court pressing defenders? He's the man. Need a basket amidst the tall trees? The 5'6" spitfire with mad hops can deliver. A 3-pointer to send the game into overtime? Estolas has made a name for himself with clutch triples.

Hailing from La Union in the Philippines, the 42-year-old first dribbled a basketball at age 7. "I have older brothers who were players in our neighborhood. I got a liking to the sport when I first played one-on-one at that age. A lot of people were watching and I really loved the feeling of people cheering you on in basketball," he told TAGA *Plus* in Tagalog.

Estolas played varsity in high school, but momentarily hung up his sneakers when he enrolled at the Baguio Colleges Foundation to concentrate on his studies. During summer, he still played basketball and managed to win championships and several MVPs in local leagues.

In 2002, he took his talent to the CNMI and quickly became a household name with his exploits on the court. He was so fast with the basketball that Ferdie de la Torre nicknamed him "The Flash" during the veteran reporter's short dalliance as a sports reporter.

Aside from seeing action in the United Filipino Organization basketball league, Estolas also suited up for the inter-hotel, inter-business, and restaurant leagues, QQ Rent-A-Car league, EUCON Friendly tournament, and a host of other seemingly alphabet soup competitions like MDX, DLX, UBA, and SIP.

Along the way, Estolas not only reaped team success with championships aplenty but also garnered individual accolades, bringing home platefuls of mythical team selections, scoring leader trophies, MVPs, and even a best import award.

Asked what championship he cherishes the most, Estolas' quick answer was Mobil's three-peat in the Emon Lodge No. 179 Brotherhood Basketball League. "It's hard enough to win one championship. What more to win three straight. We also went up against very good teams and, after winning it in the first year, we pretty much had a big target in our backs the next two. We won the first year and successfully defended our championship two more times so the three straight championships were really special to me."

Estolas has two favorite teammates—one in the Philippines and one on Saipan. "In the Philippines, it would be no other than Joel Pagar. We knew each other's games so well, that's why we played very well together. On Saipan, it would have to be Gyles Ruluked. We played in so many teams that it came to a point where I would just give him a wink and he already knows the play we'll be running," he said.

Nowadays, you wouldn't see much of Estolas in the local courts playing basketball, except for the occasional training sessions with his sons. Local basketball leagues are also currently in hiatus, so there's not much reason for him to hone his craft.

Another reason Estolas is in semi-retirement from the sport he loves are nagging injuries from over three decades of playing

MARK RABAGO

Andres "Jun" Estolas with sons Eros and Kian.

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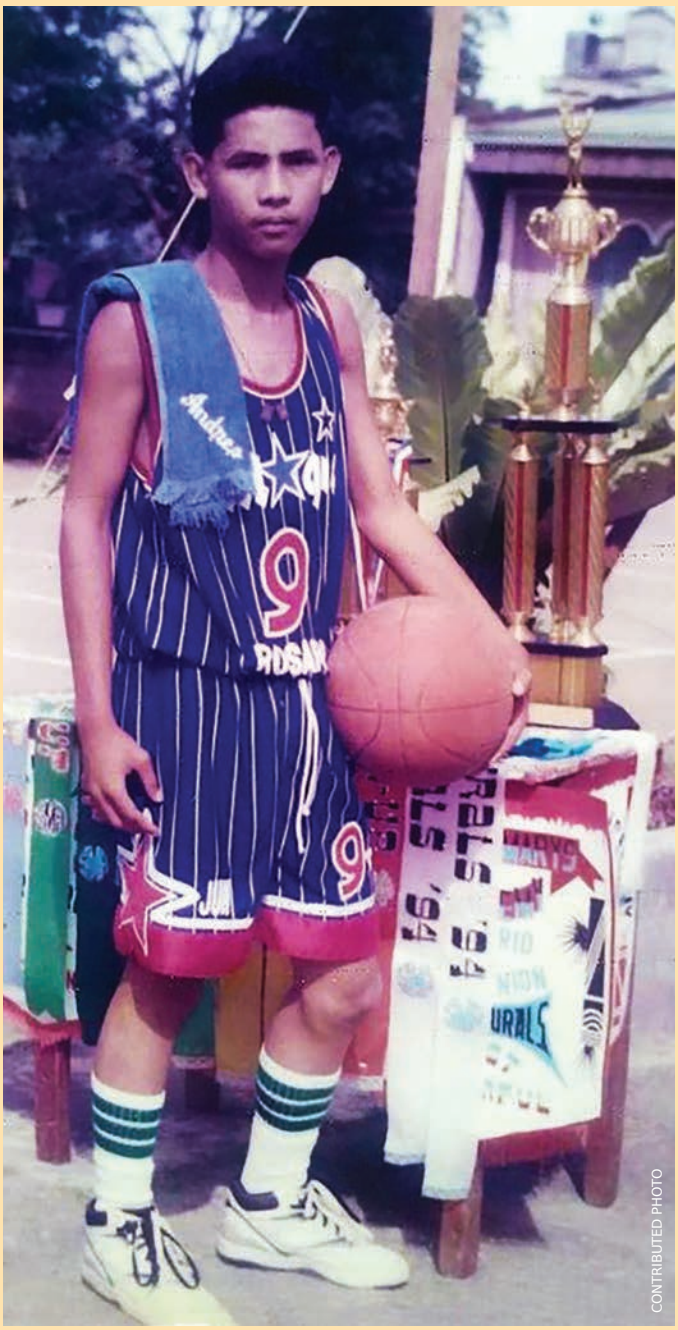

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

MARK RABAGO

basketball. He first sustained a torn knee ligament during an invitational on Tinian some years ago and hasn't been the same since.

"Of course I still played despite my injury. It would be OK for a while but I would always re-injure it," he said, adding that he even had his knee checked at St. Luke's Medical Center in the Philippines when he went home for a vacation in 2016.

Aside from work and taking care of his family, he keeps himself busy these days by going fishing. Estolas said he has achieved everything he has ever dreamed of in basketball. The next chapter of his basketball journey would be coaching his sons and, through them, perhaps also become a championship coach. "I really hope one day to coach my sons and win a championship."

Left photo: A 16-year-old Estolas lining up for the opening parade of one of the leagues in La Union, Philippines. **Right photo:** Estolas at 42 years old.

JUSTINE NAUTA

You can't have a rainbow without a little rain. Like life, you can't always have happy days without overcoming hard ones. This rainbow came after a whole morning of nonstop rain.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Tired of hiking, driving, or just skimming through the ocean's surface? Go down to a local dive shop to experience a first-class trip underwater and meet the many species of fish that the islands offer.

NEIL FAMA

Sunset colors aren't only orange, pink, red, etc., there are stunning blue and yellow rays that are equally breathtaking! This particulate sunset not only cast blue and yellow rays but also radiates so much peace you won't want to miss it.

JUSTINE NAUTA

As the sun sets, you're greeted with this peaceful, dark blanket that covers the sun. Don't be scared, though. Bright stars follow.

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

JUSTINE NAUTA

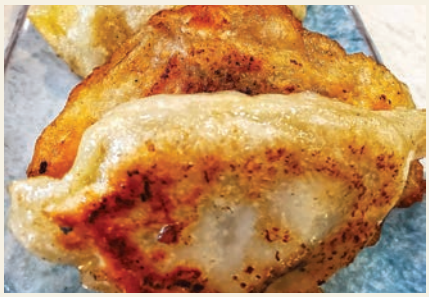
On the hike to Hidden Beach, we came across a lonely, stranded goat. They are friendly and won't charge at you.

JUSTINE NAUTA

The Old Japanese Lighthouse is famous for its view overlooking Garapan going west. Fun fact: The lighthouse was built in 1934 to assist ships navigating into Tanapag Harbor on the western coast of Saipan. It is one of the few surviving pre-World War II civilian structures built by the Japanese.

JUSTINE NAUTA

Here's a view that you don't have to pay for! Every place you stop at, once the sun goes down, the island showcases its breath-taking sunsets that you don't have to go far for.



JUSTINE NAUTA

A hidden restaurant gem in Garapan called Chung Gi Wa serves the biggest dumpling on the island! For only $6 you get the juiciest ground pork with green onions, garlic, soy sauce, and sesame oil. Their gyoza dipping sauce is the cherry on top.

JUSTINE NAUTA

Happy hour from 4pm to 8pm? Say yes! Aqua Resort Club offers delicious fresh tuna poke, pair it with a virgin piña colada or any kind of drink, and it's like you're on another island. Not a fan of fish? That's okay, Aqua's happy hour also includes other options like the spaghetti Bolognese.

JUSTINE NAUTA

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and lack of tourists, many restaurants have readjusted their target market to cater to island residents, which means prices are dropping. Loco and Taco, for example, now offers $1 tacos every day and not just on Taco Tuesdays! These two tacos are the Carne Asada (Beef) and Beef Colorado.

JUSTINE NAUTA

Ayuyu (a-zu-zu), translates to coconut crab, the rarest crab on Saipan, but you can find an abundance on Rota. If you're lucky enough to be served one on the table, take that opportunity to taste its delicate, sweet flavor.

JUSTINE NAUTA

Kinpachi is one of the "OG" restaurants that has been on the island for 40 years now. My family has taken a special liking to their firm and chewy fried calamari. Probably the best you'll find on the island.

JUSTINE NAUTA

Stop by Java Joes and try their tasty, mouthwatering burger, which they can adjust to suit your fancy. For picky eaters, they won't add onions, pickles, or tomatoes. In fact, it's all up to you.

JUSTINE NAUTA

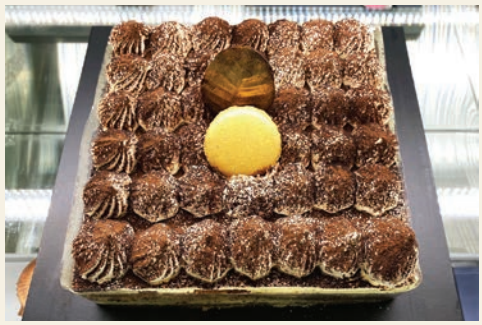
Thinking of switching to a more vegetarian diet or just not into meat at all? Wild Bill's offers vegetarian options throughout their menu. Their stir-fry vegetables with chili-tofu is a flavorful, vegan option!

NEIL FAMA

Global warming is too real because this heat is unbearable, but you know what else is real? These ice-cold frappes from Sunny Side Cafe in Garapan! These mocha and caramel frappe can also cure your sweet tooth.

JUSTINE NAUTA

Kensington is known for having the finest desserts on the islands! Look at their baked cheesecake! Speaking from experience, one slice will have you wanting more. It's almost as if you can taste the hard work and love that went into making this baked wonder.



JUSTINE NAUTA

Tiramisu, a classic coffee dessert. Do I even need to say more? Ladyfingers soaked in the finest coffee, layered with a whipped mixture of eggs, sugar, and mascarpone cheese, with cocoa powder sprinkled on top. You don't need to go to Paris to experience this gorgeous dessert, although that would be nice.

JUSTINE NAUTA

Another classic! Macarons are in demand these days. Skip the process of placing your order a day in advance and get them now at Kensington's OHAS Café.

JUSTINE NAUTA

Not into cake or cheesecake? No worries, Kensington offers fruit tart that's to die for! Imagine a baked, firm, crumbly shell with an almost cookie-like texture, soft cream that's whipped to perfection, and finished with a layer of fruits...my oh my, your mouth is in for a refreshing treat!

JUSTINE NAUTA

Where are my chocolate lovers at? This opera cake is made with an almond sponge cake, called Jaconde, that's brushed with coffee, a spread of strawberry jam that's then layered with a mix of chocolate ganache and coffee that goes into the buttercream to create a chocolate coffee buttercream, and finally, topped with a layer of chocolate ganache. Fun fact: The opera cake was invented in 1955 by a great French pastry chef. His wife said the layers of the cake reminded her of the Paris Opera House, thus the name, opera cake.

JUSTINE NAUTA

At Kensington's OHAS Café, they offer mini desserts that you can buy before making a larger purchase of a cake. In this photo, they showcase their baked cheesecake with blueberries and a roll cake, which is a sponge cake layered with a not-so-sweet whipped cream, rolled to perfection, cut into ideal pieces, then topped with a swirl of their whipped cream and blueberry and a strawberry.

JUSTINE NAUTA

When entering a facility, you have to now wait at a 6-foot distance and get your temperature checked. At the Aqua Resort Club, even families from the same household must also keep their distance and have their temperatures checked before entering the hotel.

NEIL FAMA

Let's be honest, quarantine pounds aren't easy to shave off. Luckily, the Oleai Sports Complex's track and field is still open, which means early morning or late night jogging will help slim you down! With its large track, people are still able to maintain social distancing while getting in their 4,000 steps.

The bright red bell-shaped flowers grow in clusters at the end of branches, often after the leaves have dropped, givi plant a distinctive look. Saipan offers a Flame Tree Festival every February or March that celebrates the trees bloc

JUSTINE NAUTA

We have officially entered the "-ber" months, which means... Christmas time in the Marianas! Christmas has a lot of meaning but, in a traditional, Catholic household, a table is usually set up to honor the birth of Jesus Christ.

JUSTINE NAUTA

Legend says these minions somehow wiggled their way out of Gru's sight and landed on Saipan where they have started filming their own movie, *Minions on Saipan*. Just kidding. A secluded AirB&B called Karis Villa in Dandan turned scuba diving tanks into minions from *Despicable Me*, most of them with coconut bras, grass skirts, and a flower on their head.

PLEASE WEAR A FACE MASK
SOCIAL DISTANCING
WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY
WEAR YOUR MASK CORRECTLY
KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF YOUR FACE

Speaking of the new normal, schools have stepped up with more safety p tions. At a private school, they have secured their main office with new wal include plexiglass for protection.

JUSTINE NAUTA

NEIL FAMA

Sunsets are literally breathtaking. No matter how bright or how light the colors are, every sunset is a surprise. Just like life, every day is a surprise or a gift. Blink once and you just might miss it.

ng the
oming.

JUSTINE NAUTA

JUSTINE NAUTA

Saipan recently revived its motocross group, and, according to *Saipan Tribune* archives, the Marianas Racing Association is back! Cuki Alvarez, who not only owns a mixed martial arts school called Trench Tech but is also a MRA official reviving the group after 11 years of inactivity. Isn't that amazing?

NEIL FAMA

Oh, to be a bird in the sky with no worries, free of responsibilities. This type of white bird can be seen almost anywhere you go on the island. They're usually in pairs or a trio, but this one was flying solo.

NEIL FAMA

Saipan Tribune's Iva Maurin wrote an educational piece on these passion butterflies. In her article, we learned that they are actually called the Gulf Fritillary and have a wingspan that is up to 95 millimeters long. The wings are bright orange with black markings, their sides brown, with prominent three white spots lined with black on each wing.

LOVO

The art of underground cooking

BEACABRERA
beecabbie@gmail.com
TAGA *Plus* Contributing Writer

Lovo is a Fijian term that means "earth or ground oven" cooking and has its roots many centuries ago on the island of Fiji in Micronesia. It is somewhat akin to the Marianas' version of barbecue or "tunu," which means cooking over fire because you end up savoring the smoky flavor of the meat after it is done.

However, lovo requires digging about a foot deep circular hole on the ground, filling it with river rocks, and lighting a fire with wood inside the hole until the stones turn white hot.

The food—bound and wrapped together in beautifully braided coconut fronds—is then placed on the hole in the ground. The underground pit is then covered with banana leaves, palm fronds, burlap sacks and, soil on top to trap the heat from the white-hot rocks and that is when the magic happens.

Saipan resident Yogi Singh grew up embracing this tradition while in Lautoka, Fiji. By tradition, a lovo is usually done to celebrate a special occasion where family and friends gather and share a meal.

"We started doing lovo in Fiji as a family. …We never attempted to do one early on here on Saipan because it seemed like a very complicated process. Then Penny, an indigenous Fijian helper at our home, showed us how to do a lovo and it was pretty simple when we saw how it was done," Singh said.

One memory he has of doing lovo at home was when the meter reader guy was at their house to read the power meter and noticed their lovo pit. "He asked us how we wrap our meat and we answered in aluminum foil. He said, 'I will teach you a new way' then goes to his car, grabbed a machete, cuts a coconut »

"Lovo is a group effort to put food on the table"

BEA CABRERA

Banana leaves, coconut fronds, burlap sack, and soil are placed on top to keep the food safe from the elements and to help trap smoke and heat inside.

In doing lovo, preparation is key, said Yogi Singh.

BEA CABRERA

When river rocks turn hot white, that is the perfect time to put in the food to slow cook for hours.

BEA CABRERA

palm frond and grabbed a cinder block from our yard, which he used as a table so he can weave the frond. From that day on, I have never used aluminum foil for wrapping meat," Singh said.

Preparation is key to a successful lovo. "Heating up the underground oven or pit takes three to four hours and that is a good time to get your meat and vegetables ready."

Lovo cooking is not just a traditional way of cooking; it is also a communal process. Singh usually involves all his friends in the process—from looking for river rocks, to digging the pit, starting the fire, and preparing the food.

"Lovo is a group effort to put food on the table. Everyone is working as a team. We have yard games to keep the fun rolling while waiting for the food to cook. … Once it's time, the pit is unearthed to reveal tender and deliciously cooked food and everyone enjoys the feast together," he said.

Everything can be cooked in a lovo, from fish to chicken and pork. "I also make 'palusami,' a dish with taro leaves filled with corned beef or mutton, onions and coconut cream," Singh said.

He believes that sharing his Fijian roots and culture creates an interaction that is accompanied with benefits and special memories. "My first lovo on Saipan was in 2005…and I have been practicing this cooking method every year and everywhere I go, like Texas and Iowa. Everyone would be fascinated and are willing to take part in the process and bring their own dishes. …This way, the exchange is meaningful. In fact, I encourage all my friends to learn the techniques of this simple but very hearty cooking style," he said.

"I believe that it is a tradition that should be continued and it can done by anyone who has even just a small space in the yard. …For me, the biggest challenge of doing a lovo is finding good river stones here on island but friends would help. They know the search is a struggle but they also know the lovo meal in the end makes it all worth it," he added.

10 best hanging plants for creating an indoor jungle

Hanging houseplants have returned in a big way as demand for plants has skyrocketed in the pandemic and Instagram influencers create indoor jungles.

Plant parents love to dote on their houseplants, especially now that everyone is hunkering down at home, but are all indoor plants well suited to hanging?

Bloomscape's resident plant expert Joyce Mast advises evaluating your home and lifestyle before choosing a houseplant to hang in your home.

"What kind of light will your plant enjoy?" Mast asked. "How much time will you have to take care of its needs? And are you able to reach the plant (to water) once it is hanging in your home?"

From fast-growing philodendron to trailing spider plants, here are varieties that will do well in baskets and macramé hangers.

LISABOONE
Los Angeles Times

1 Silver satin pothos (*Scindapsus pictus*)

In the wild, a Scindapsus plant can climb as high as the crown of a tree, while indoors, it can grow up to 6 feet tall. "This trailing plant enjoys low to bright indirect light areas, is very easy to care for, and looks lovely as a hanging plant as its patterned silvery green leaves drape over," Mast said. **TIP**: Feel free to take a cutting from this one and share at plant swaps as they are easy to propagate. If vines grow too long, simply cut back the stems in the spring just below a healthy leaf.

2 Heartleaf philodendron (*Philodendron hederaceum*)

This popular philodendron features distinctive pointed tips and can be grown as a climber or a trailing vine. "These fast-growing heart-shaped plants enjoy low to bright indirect light areas and are very easy to care for—they're happy in most areas of the home," said Mast. **TIP**: This plant can handle its soil drying out from time to time. Just water it thoroughly and then hang it back up. As a quick grower, it is an excellent choice for the trailing-plants-as-curtains look.

3 Philodendron hederaceum 'Brasil'

This variety of the popular heartleaf philodendron features beautiful yellow and lime green leaves that look dramatic cascading from bookshelves and hangers. Mast likes it as a "fast-growing, vining plant that is very easy to care for and will thrive in low to bright indirect light." **TIP**: If it gets long and leggy, simply pinch it back for a fuller look.

4 Neon prayer plant (*Maranta*)

Hardy Maranta earned its common name because of the way its leaves close at nightfall. "This vibrant plant stands out with bright green oval leaves and a herringbone-like pattern of light yellow veining," said Mast. "The colorful foliage makes this a perfect plant for window sills or shelves that need a splash of color." **TIP**: Maranta thrives in humid conditions, so it's a good idea to give it a light mist every few days.

5 Wandering dude (*Tradescantia zebrina*)

This striking purple plant, now commonly known as the Wandering dude plant is easy to care for, fast-growing, and will trail quickly. It can also take some direct sunlight if necessary. TIP: Pinch back the long vines at a joint on the stem to encourage branching as it can become leggy with bare stems. Because it is a plant that prefers a slightly more humid environment, this is a good choice for bathrooms and kitchens.

6 Hoya obovata

Hoyas have thick, waxy leaves, are great climbers, and prefer bright, indirect light. With their striking trailing leaves, hoyas are perfect for bookshelves, mantles and hangers. **TIP**: Group a variety of hoyas in a row (other popular varieties include Hoya kerrii and Hoya carnosa) to make a statement, as shown above.

7 String of bananas (*Curio radicans*)

Native to South Africa, this succulent features distinctive banana-shaped foliage, also known as "fish hooks," and is a good choice for sun-drenched south-facing windows. **TIP**: String of bananas is prone to aphids, so watch the tips of the plants for insects.

8 String of Pearls (*Curio rowleyanus*)

String of Pearls, formerly known as Senecio rowleyanus, is a popular trailing plant with pea-shaped leaves. It loves heat and indirect sunlight but can tolerate lower light if necessary. As a drought-tolerant succulent, water String of pearls when the soil is dry. **TIP**: The attractive stems can break off easily, so install it in a place with limited traffic.

»

9 **Spider plant (*Chlorophytum comosum*)**
Spider plants, sometimes called airplane plants because of their arching leaves and floating plantlets, grow well in hanging baskets. They prefer bright, indirect light, but too much sun can scorch their leaves. Water regularly and allow to dry out in between feedings. **TIP**: Propagate single plantlets by removing them from the stem and rooting them in water. When roots are an inch long, transfer them to potting soil.

10 **Baby Tears (*Pilea depressa*)**
This delicate plant creates a stunning mat of creeping stems that prefer moist, well-drained soil in a part shade to full shade location. They are thirsty plants and require frequent watering. **TIP**: Baby's tears thrive in humidity, so they are an ideal choice for steamy kitchens and bathrooms.

HOW TO CARE FOR AND ARRANGE PLANTS

Here are a few tips for basic plant care and ideas for arranging greenery in your home:

1
By far the biggest mistake people make when caring for plants is overwatering them. Most plants only need a small drink once per week. Succulents need water about every three weeks. To test whether a plant needs water, stick a finger about 1.5 inches into the soil. If the soil feels arid and doesn't stick to your finger, give your plant a little drink.

2
Plants need room to grow, so repot if your greenery is busting out of its container. Use good potting soil; you can ask a nursery expert which soil mix would work best for your plant type. Also find out if a plant needs a pot with a drainage hole to thrive.

3
Avoid temperature extremes. Don't place plants near radiators or heating/AC vents. Tropical plants that enjoy humidity appreciate being misted once or twice a month or being near a humidifier.

4
Place plants of varying sizes together for a visually appealing look and incorporate stools and benches as perches.

5
Put plants in unexpected places, such as in baskets, birdcages and colorful teapots and on repainted ladders.

6
If you have limited space, try grouping small plants together on a windowsill, desk, bookshelf or small table or console.

7
Bunch succulents together in similar containers, such as coffee mugs, jars or old bowls.

Emily Rosenbaum/Tribune News Service

Is your hand sanitizer **safe** and **effective?**

Washing with soap and water is the best way to rid your hands of visible dirt and mucus, which may contain viruses like the one that causes COVID-19. But, when on the go, using hand rub or liquid hand sanitizer is the second best option.

There are a lot of different types of hand sanitizers, but how do you know what products are safe? Dr. Gregory Poland, a Mayo Clinic infectious diseases expert, says there are a few things you'll want to check the label for, starting with the type of alcohol it contains.

"You want to select a hand sanitizer with at least 60%, ideally 70%, ethyl alcohol in it," says Dr. Poland.

While ethyl alcohol is safe and effective, some products may contain other types of alcohol that should be avoided.

"You do not want a hand sanitizer that has methyl alcohol. Methyl alcohol is a toxin and should not be used. Unfortunately, what unethical producers are doing, in order to meet the demand and sell their product for hand sanitizer, is they're using methyl alcohol, which is very cheap," says Dr. Poland.

Another ingredient to avoid is 1-propanol alcohol, which is also a toxin.

Finally, check the expiration date. Like most products, hand sanitizers become less effective over time as the alcohol content wanes.

"Generally speaking, the ethanol-based hand sanitizers have about a three-year window," says Dr. Poland.

Consumers should check the Food and Drug Administration website to view a list of hand sanitizer products that should not be used. ***(Mayo Clinic News Network)***

What to look for in a hand sanitizer

- The CDC says hand sanitizers should be at least 60% ethyl alcohol or 70% isopropyl alcohol.
- You should avoid anything with methanol or 1-propanol, both of which can be highly toxic.
- Health officials also say to avoid hand sanitizers that replace alcohol with benzalkonium chloride, which is less effective at killing certain bacteria and viruses.
- You should only use hand sanitizer when you can't wash your hands with soap and water. Hand washing is better at removing more germs.

Source: AP **Graphic:** Staff, TNS

Information in this post was accurate at the time of its posting. Due to the fluid nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, scientific understanding, along with guidelines and recommendations, may have changed since the original publication date. Check the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website for additional updates on COVID-19. For more information and all your COVID-19 coverage, go to the Mayo Clinic News Network and mayoclinic.org.

SIMONA PILOLLA/DREAMSTIME/TNS

Why find a roommate for retirement? Two incomes are better than one, and who wants to be lonely?

The case for a retirement roommate

CARLAFRIED
Rate.com

Getting older often means living alone.

According to the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, more than 40% of people at least age 65 live alone, and 57% of people in their 80s live alone.

At the same time, atop nearly every list of retirement worries is this one: running out of money.

For open-minded seniors living on their own, adding a roommate, or becoming the roommate, can be a savvy move. Sure, just like in your 20s, you don't want the roommate from hell. But come on, by now you know what you like and don't like. Your vetting skills are sharp. And perhaps you already have a network of friends who might be up for considering the move, or for helping you find a good match.

The math is compelling. The average monthly Social Security check in 2020 is around $1,500. Sharing the rent, or the carrying costs for a home that one of you owns, becomes a whole lot easier on two checks.

Or maybe you're a suburban empty nester itching to live in the city, yet don't think you have the retirement income to make the move. Might sharing city rent make it doable?

Sharing housing costs can free up money to add in supportive services. A housekeeper a few times a month can be especially valued later in life. Or someone to do the heavy weeding in your garden.

Or perhaps sharing housing costs is what makes it possible to live bigger. More travel (remember travel?). More of whatever floats your boat: sporting events, theater, concerts. In your 20s, a roommate may have been a necessity. In your 60s, 70s and beyond, it has the potential to give you the flexibility to live the life you want.

And if you find a mutually agreeable pairing, you've also taken a big step in warding off one of the biggest risks for the elderly: social isolation. Hopefully we never again encounter the isolation that has been necessary during the coronavirus pandemic, but for those single people who have a roommate the strain hopefully has been less acute.

OK, on to logistics.

First off, think about friends. Be a trailblazer and raise the topic with friends who might be interested, and within your social networks where someone you know might be a matchmaker. If you are in a situation where taking on a roommate would solve a lot of problems, do you seriously think there aren't other people you know with the same concerns? Be the bold one who starts the conversation.

Don't be shy about mentioning your roommate investigation to any local groups you belong to, such as your house of worship.

If friends or connections don't come through, see if where you live (or want to live) is represented in online sites that match roommates. Silvernest.com is all about matching mature folk. You can search as both a roommate looking for a place to live, or a homeowner looking to find someone to share your place. And give some non-age-specific sites a spin. The SpareRoom website recently shared that its volume of users over age 50 looking for a housing match is growing at twice the pace of other ages.

Insist on a trial run of a month before you commit. Even if you know someone as a friend, that doesn't mean you know much about how they live. And before anyone moves anywhere, run through a very detailed list of the nitty-gritty:

- Will you split grocery bills? Share meals?
- How will the common areas be cleaned?
- Smoking? Pets? Grandkids?

OK, on that last one, just make sure you're on the same page about how often and how long your place will be invaded. Yes, you love them. And your roomie may too, but boundaries are how everyone stays content.

- As for payment, the same good financial etiquette that works for the 20-somethings is what you should do as well: Set up an automated direct deposit if you are paying the rent. If you both are paying rent, consider setting up a joint bank account and agree you will both set up automated deposits on a set date each month to cover rent and any other shared expenses. And from that account you should automate payment to the landlord. Sound formal? Exactly. That's how you reduce tension over money.
- Moving out: How much advance notice will you be required to give?

A web search will turn up resources for a roommate agreement. It's a smart step to take, as it will prompt you to consider all sorts of angles that need to be ironed out before they become problems.

DIVISION OF YOUTH SERVICES
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY & CULTURAL AFFAIRS
COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS
F&YEP PARENT EDUCATION SERVICES

PARENTING IN A PANDEMIC:
Tips to Keep the Calm at Home

USE POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

Everyone is more anxious and worried during the pandemic. Younger children may not have the words to describe their feelings. They're more likely to act out their stress, anxiety or fear through their behavior which can, in turn, upset parents particularly if they are already stressed. Older children and teens may be extra irritable as they miss out with friends and special events being cancelled.

Some ways you can help your children manage their emotions and behavior:

- **Redirect bad behavior.** Sometimes children misbehave because they are bored or don't know any better. Find something else for them to do.

- **Direct your attention** – to reinforce good behaviors and discourage others is a powerful tool. Notice good behavior and point it out, praising success and good tries. Explaining clear expectations, particularly with older children, can help with this.

- **Use rewards & privileges** to reinforce good behaviors (chores, getting along with siblings, etc.) that wouldn't normally be given during less stressful times.

- **Know when not to respond.** As long as your child isn't doing something dangerous and gets attention for good behavior, ignoring bad behavior can be an effective way of stopping it.

- **Take care of yourself.** Caregivers also should be sure to take care of themselves physically, eat healthy, exercise and get enough sleep. Find ways to decompress and take breaks. If more than one parent is home, take turns watching the children if possible.

ASKING FOR HELP IS A SIGN OF STRENGTH

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